

# REPORT / RECOMMENDATION



**To:** Edina Transportation Commission

**Agenda Item #:** VI. C.

**From:** Mark K. Nolan, AICP, Transportation Planner

**Action** ☐

**Date:** March 20, 2014

**Discussion** ☒

**Information** ☐

**Subject:** Minneapolis, Northfield and Southern (MN&S) Railway Corridor Discussion

## Action Requested:

Discuss potential issues regarding the Minneapolis, Northfield and Southern (MN&S) Railway Corridor. Issues may include the impacts of the Southwest LRT freight rail re-route options and potential future use of the corridor for light rail transit (LRT). If necessary, action may include making recommendations to City Council regarding these issues.

## Information / Background:

Please recall that at the October 24 ETC meeting the group Safety in the Park gave a presentation regarding issues surrounding the Southwest LRT and potential freight rail re-route options. Their presentation addressed the planned "southern arm" option, which runs on MN&S track through Edina (west of Highway 100). Safety in the Park discussed how the possibility exists for increased freight traffic with this option, potentially impacting Edina neighborhoods. This was discussed at the December 19, 2013 ETC meeting.

Also recall that at the January 16, 2014 ETC meeting, Dave Christianson from the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) gave a presentation on regional rail (freight and SWLRT) and its current and potential impacts to Edina neighborhoods. Additionally, at the February 27 ETC Special Meeting, members of the community expressed a desire to study the feasibility of running LRT and/or diesel multiple unit (DMU) passenger rail in the MN&S corridor. Currently, state law prohibits the Metropolitan Council from studying, planning, designing or constructing passenger rail in this corridor (sometimes referred to as the "gag rule").

## Attachments:

October 24, 2013 Safety in the Park Presentation (slides 18-30)

January 16, 2014 MnDOT Regional Rail Update Presentation

## The St. Louis Park Freight Rail Re-Route



An important component that affects Edina directly is the planned "Southern Arm".

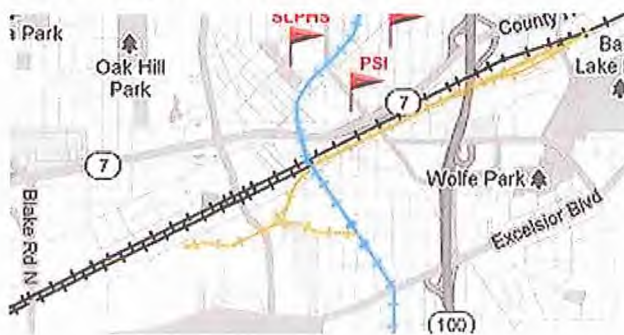
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## The St. Louis Park Freight Rail Re-Route



The Southern Arm would replace a "switching wye" in St. Louis Park that enables trains to change direction from East/West to North/South and vice versa. It's a cumbersome procedure, rarely utilized.



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## The St. Louis Park Freight Rail Re-Route



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## The St. Louis Park Freight Rail Re-Route

As part of the SWLRT plan the switching wye may be replaced by a southern arm to accomplish the same task-changing direction.



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# The St. Louis Park Freight Rail Re-Route

The SLP City Council favors the southern arm because it eliminates the switching wye and because it removes several light industrial buildings making way for more dense economic development and a more southerly Louisiana LRT station. The cost of the southern arm is estimated by the Met Council to be \$30M.



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# The St. Louis Park Freight Rail Re-Route

In combination with the southern arm, a “swap” is also planned.

As LRT approaches St. Louis Park from the west, the LRT track will be “collocated” with freight rail. LRT will be on the north side, freight on the south.

The plan is to “swap” those two, placing LRT on the south and freight on the north. Doing so is favored by SLP and Hopkins because more land is available on the south side of the tracks creating more economic development space and eliminating the need for LRT users to cross the freight track to get to LRT.

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## The St. Louis Park Freight Rail Re-Route



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## The St. Louis Park Freight Rail Re-Route



The combination of the Swap and the Southern Arm is estimated by the Met Council to cost \$60M.

Only the SLP re-route (in the most recent plan) **REQUIRES** these elements because building the northerly arm of the Brunswick Central plan would wipe out the Switching Wye and the railroad demands *some* way to change direction. Therefore, the actual cost of the Brunswick Central is \$260M, not just \$200M. Collocation does not require southern arm.

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## The St. Louis Park Freight Rail Re-Route



While SitP's main goal is to stop an SLP re-route, we are also concerned about the Southern Arm. Depending on market conditions, the Southern Arm will make it possible for long, heavy freight trains to cross several St. Louis Park roads, including Excelsior Blvd, at grade creating safety issues. It is, again, modifying a track that was never built for such purposes into a mainline.

This should concern Edina as well since the MN&S travels past churches, homes, and more in close proximity.

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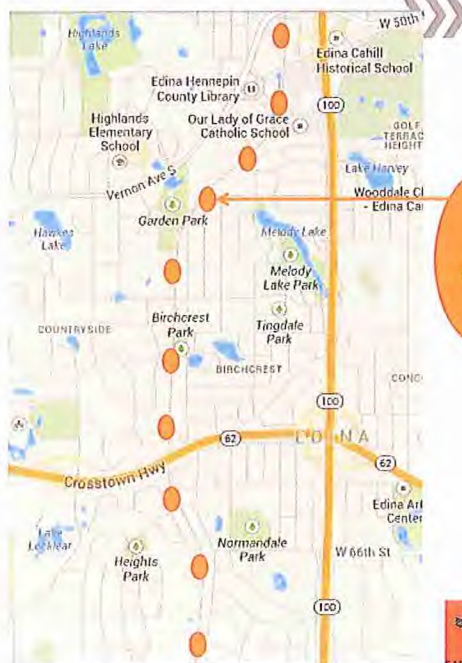
### The St. Louis Park Freight Rail Re-Route

How does this effect Edina?

If market conditions are favorable, it could mean large increases in freight headed to the Minnesota River Docks.

Most importantly, once this is built, there is no turning back. Federal law protects rail lines in perpetuity.

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## The St. Louis Park Freight Rail Re-Route

### The Minnesota River Grain Elevator and Docks


The MN&S



Swing Bridge

Barge Loading

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## The St. Louis Park Freight Rail Re-Route

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## The St. Louis Park Freight Rail Re-Route



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Facebook: Safety in the Park

Email: [Safetyinthepark@gmail.com](mailto:Safetyinthepark@gmail.com)

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## ***2014 Regional Rail Update***

Edina Transportation Commission

January 16, 2014

### **Southwest LRT Update**

- Met Council Studies at Governor's request
- Re-examine Freight Rail Alternatives, Options
- Water Resources Protection
- Landscape/Greenscape Preservation
- Possible Resolutions early 2014
- Resolution Necessary to Preserve High Priority Status in FTA New Starts Funding Queue

## What additional analysis is being done?

JANUARY 2014

**New studies of freight rail options, water resources and landscaping are now underway in response to local concerns.**

The Metropolitan Council selected national engineering firm TranSystems to independently analyze freight rail relocation options and another national engineering firm, Burns & McDonnell, to independently evaluate potential impacts to water resources. Meanwhile, the Southwest LRT Project Office is conducting a landscape inventory.

Draft results of these three efforts are expected to be released in late January 2014 for public comment. Final results will be presented to the public and to the project's advisory committees, and will be reviewed by the Metropolitan Council before it votes on the project scope and budget.

The project office worked closely with technical staff from Hennepin County, the cities of Minneapolis and St. Louis Park, as well as the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board and the public in developing the scopes of work.



### FREIGHT RAIL

The freight rail location consultant is independently reviewing existing studies and designs, assessing viability of location options already considered and identifying any new viable options based on the freight rail metrics.



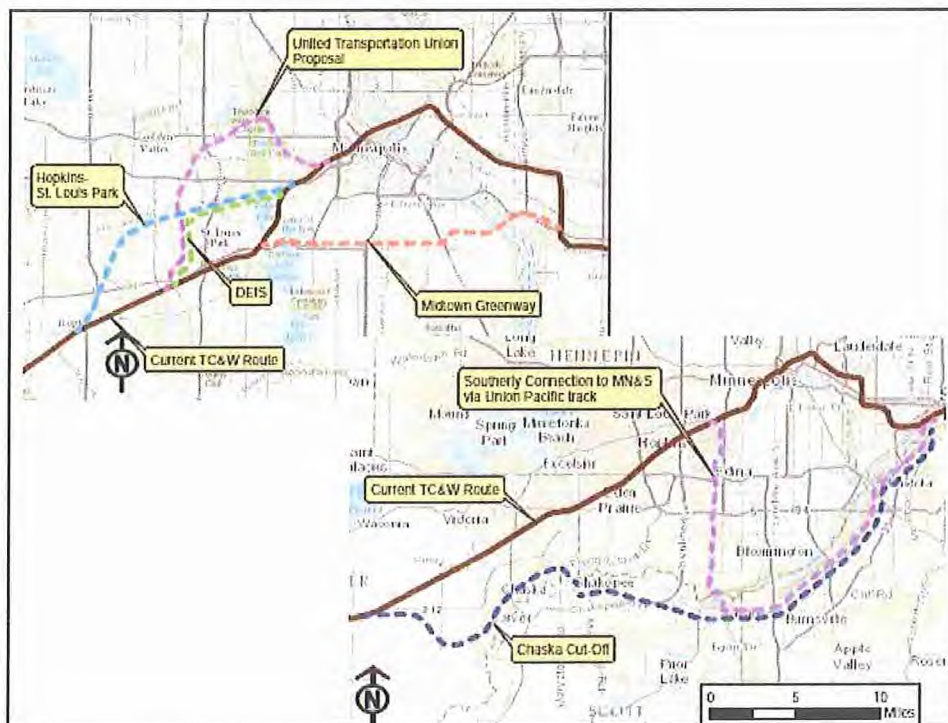
### WATER RESOURCES

The water resources consultant is independently assessing impacts of LRT construction and operation on water levels and quality within the Kenilworth Corridor.



### LANDSCAPING/GREENSCAPING

The landscaping/greenscaping inventory is identifying existing trees and vegetation and will identify re-vegetation opportunities with LRT construction in the Kenilworth Corridor.





## What makes freight rail relocation so difficult?

JANUARY 2014

Today, more trains operate on fewer miles of track than in the past. With freight traffic on many lines near capacity, relocation options are limited.

In Minnesota, the total length of active freight railroads decreased from 8,500 miles in 1980 to 4,400 miles in 2010. Over the same period, freight tonnage increased 74% – from 140 million to 243 million tons annually.

As freight rail companies have merged and consolidated their services, abandonment of tracks has reduced freight rail lines in the Twin Cities region from 685 to 480 route-miles.

The Twin Cities continues to be an important part of the national freight rail network. St. Paul freight yards and junctions handle roughly 5% of all U.S. rail traffic.

By 2030, the Minnesota State Rail Plan predicts an increase of 25–40% in the amount of freight shipped by rail in the state.

### FREIGHT RAIL NETWORK CHANGES

The map below shows freight rail lines in the Twin Cities region (2013). Freight routes that have been abandoned since 1970 are shown in yellow.



Freight railroads are "common carriers," and their services are regulated by federal law.

The Surface Transportation Board (STB) is the federal agency charged with overseeing economic impacts on freight rail shippers and carriers.

STB approval is generally required for changes in service, abandonment of active freight lines, or other changes that have economic impacts.

To make such changes, a freight rail carrier is required to submit an application to the STB for their review and approval.

The Southwest LRT Project Office is working with freight rail companies, the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRA) and the STB.



## Freight Rail

- TC&W experiencing moderate traffic growth, particularly grain and ethanol via unit trains
- CP (Dan Patch or MN&S line) not expected to change materially – weekday switch & occasional TC&W transfers
- Major bottlenecks on CP; rail bridges, especially Savage Swing Bridge (TC&W)
- No prospective Crude-By-Rail moves (Bakken)





## Who depends on the freight rail service that passes through Kenilworth?

JANUARY 2014

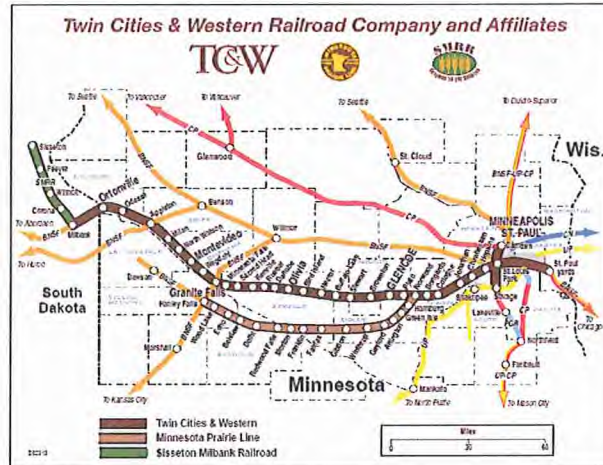
The Twin Cities & Western (TC&W) Railroad serves Minnesota and South Dakota, and is the sole rail service provider for 40 communities.

TC&W is a short-line freight railroad company, formed in 1991, that operates over 283 miles of track in Minnesota and South Dakota. TC&W is affiliated with the Minnesota Prairie Line and Sisseton Milbank Railroad.

The company provides rail service to more than 50 businesses, including 6 co-operatives for grain and farm supplies, 2 ethanol plants, vegetable growers and manufacturers.

Most of the freight traffic handled by TC&W is destined for interchange in St. Paul, and is then shipped on via Interstate rail throughout the Midwest and the rest of the U.S.

Since the 1990s, demand for freight has led to increases in the size of trains operated by TC&W. The longest trains are typically "unit trains" carrying single-commodity shipments such as grain, coal or ethanol. The maximum current train size on the TC&W line is approximately 7,600 feet.



## Passenger Rail



- NLX, Chicago-Twin Cities Intercity, Rochester High Speed projects continue planning
- Federal High Speed and Intercity program in limbo; no new authorization or funding
- State Rail Plan rewrite due by February 2015
- Mankato-Minneapolis route for intercity rail indefinitely deferred; physical bottlenecks and lack of local initiative or coalition are barriers

## Shared Right-Of-Way Use

- Railroad Right-of-ways are private property
- Railroad regulation is federal prerogative
- Dan Patch R-O-W restricted in width, continuity
- Safety liabilities a major concern of railroad
- Shared use may limit future expansion, safety buffers to accidents

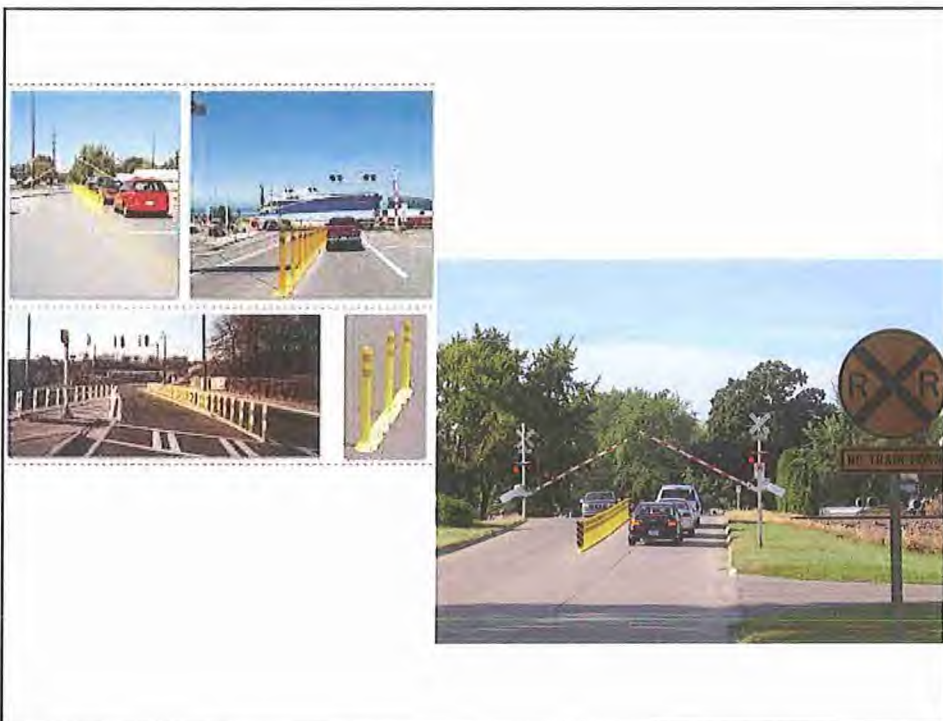


## Quiet Zones

- 2006 Federal Train Horn & Quiet Zone rule; CFR 49, Sections 222 and 229
- 110 decibel sound pressure level advised; horns constitute majority of rail intrusion
- Quiet Zone procedures established
- Safety Index formula defined for ½ mile corridors or greater-railroads must comply
- Quality of Life issue; communities liable for majority of cost

## Quiet Zone Application

- Corridor safety index must be improved after horns are silenced
- Supplemental Safety Measures (SSM's) must be agreed to with community, railroads, state and federal regulators
- SSM's and modified SSM's are specifically defined in rules.
- No federal consideration for pedestrian safety applications
- Single crossing may cost \$75,000-500,000





## R-O-W Fencing

- Statutory requirement that railroads fence property not absolute
- Railroads must allow for public crossings at convenient locations (roads, trails) but balance of R-O-W incursions considered trespass
- Legal precedence for determining liability in injury cases depends on preventability of incident

*Thank You!*

### **Dave Christianson**

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